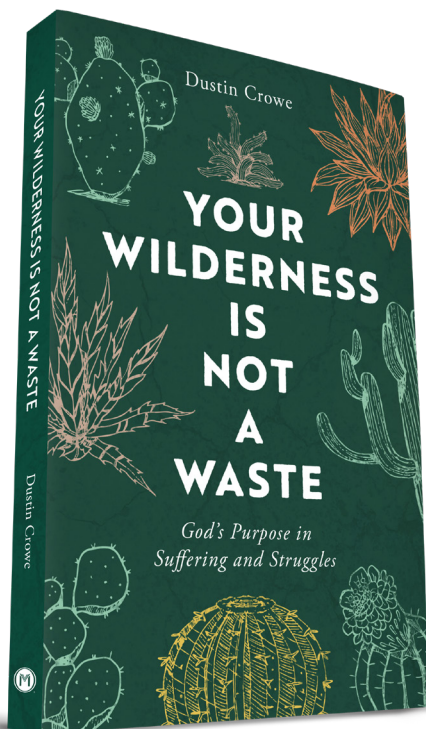




The wilderness has a dual nature, with both threats to our faith and opportunities to grow. Whether you're in a season of significant transition, spiritual apathy, heartbreak, waiting, or a time of trial and testing, God invites you to come close—to experience His provision and power.

Interested in the whole book?
Select your preferred book seller:

[MOODY PUBLISHERS](#) [AMAZON](#) [APPLE BOOKS](#) [BARNES & NOBLE](#) [WALMART](#) [CHRISTIANBOOK.COM](#) 



CONTENTS

Introduction: Welcome to the Wilderness 9

1. A Faith Formed and a Friend Found (Hagar) 19
2. God's Training Camp in the Desert (Moses) 35
3. Trust God's Winding Way Through the Wilderness (Israel) 55
4. Receive God's Daily Bread for Your Daily Burdens (Israel) 77
5. Don't Fall for the Desert Mirage (Israel) 99
6. Worship in the Wilderness (David) 119
7. God's Goodness in Drought and Despair (Elijah) 141
8. Victory In and Over the Wilderness (Jesus) 161

Conclusion: Trusting the Good Shepherd in My Wilderness 181

40 Days in the Desert Bible Reading Plan 185

Acknowledgments 187

Notes 189



CHAPTER 1

A FAITH FORMED AND A FRIEND FOUND

Hagar

What truths do you cling to in a moment of desperation? When the ground beneath you crumbles, where do you find your footing? Where can we find help and healing in the wilderness?

Several months ago, my two-year-old son suffered respiratory distress. Essentially a cold disturbed his ability to breathe normally and triggered an asthma attack. Like most health scares, it took place during the night. (Why does it always happen when everything is closed?!) We tried the normal recommendations like going outside or breathing in hot shower steam. But as his heart rate increased and he labored to breathe, we drove him to the emergency room.

We assumed they would give him a breathing treatment and send us home, but the doctors let us know his condition was worse than we thought. They informed us our son would need to be taken to a pediatric intensive care unit. A lifeline ambulance would drive him there, but unfortunately, there was only one ambulance available, and it was over an hour away. We anxiously waited and prayed and waited and prayed. We watched him breathe. We scrutinized all those numbers on his monitor—such as oxygen level and heart rate—and felt the stress with every beep of a machine. Guilt set in for not bringing him earlier. As much as one tries not to think about the “what ifs,” it’s hard to stop that train once it starts.

When the medical transport and EMS workers arrived, they listened to his lungs and evaluated him. His lungs had tightened, so they increased the oxygen and albuterol to help him breathe. Then they strapped his little body to the gurney and hooked up all the tubes and machines. He looked tired, weak, and helpless. It’s the kind of sight that makes a parent’s heart sink down to their stomach.

My wife rode in the front of the ambulance and I followed in our car. As fear and anxiety threatened to overwhelm me, as tears flowed and the prayers felt stuck on repeat, what could I cling to in that moment? I’m not immune to the same questions that haunt anyone. *Where is God? Why is He allowing this? Is He going to heal or preserve my son’s life?*

Thankfully, I had taught the week before on the story of Hagar in the wilderness (from Genesis 16 and 21). As we’ll see in this chapter, Hagar endures great pain and trauma. She fears for her life but also for the life of the child she loves. They’re alone and their future is uncertain. But what Hagar discovers in the wilderness is that God sees her and hears her. God knows her situation, and He

is full of compassion and kindness. He is present with, provides for, and protects Hagar and Ishmael in a way only He can.

When this story came to mind as I gripped my car's steering wheel, it comforted me to remember that the same God sees and hears me. He is with me and knows all the things I'm feeling, thinking, and wrestling with internally. And He cares for me in those moments. He is at work even when I can't see it or don't feel it.

As I drove behind the ambulance, anxious and afraid, I planted the feet of my faith firmly on the ground of who God is. The truth that my God is a God who sees brought me strength, hope, and some peace in those moments. It's not that all worry and stress just vanished, but I wasn't overwhelmed by it. It didn't bury me. God held my head above the waters that threatened to pull me under.

Our faith matters in moments like this. The God who is the object and source of our faith matters. Our theology isn't just for the classroom or when you're having devotions, it's for when you're in the car following your son's medical transport to the pediatric ICU. It's in our heartbreak, pain, confusion, and swirling fears that we need to know that our God is a God who sees us, hears us, knows what we're walking through, and helps us through it.

When we face any number of sorrows, stresses, or scary situations, we might feel abandoned and alone, but we are not. The story of Hagar offers us a beautiful example of God showing up and being present with someone stranded in the desert. He draws near to and befriends the brokenhearted in His infinite compassion and steadfast love. I pray that through Hagar's story you can find strength and comfort in who God is and hope in how He might use your time in the wilderness.

HAGAR: ON THE RUN BUT NEVER OUT OF SIGHT

Hagar is the servant of Sarah and Abraham, the matriarch and patriarch of Israel's dynasty. If Abraham and Sarah are the influencers of their day, Hagar is the nobody. And yet, Genesis twice turns to her story and God's care for her (Gen. 16:1–16; 21:8–21).

While God promised a son to Abraham, he and Sarah become impatient with God's timetable and provision. They take things into their own hands (which never works well), and Sarah tells Abraham to take Hagar as a second wife who can provide a child for them. Hagar becomes pregnant, but as you can imagine, this stirs up jealousy, resentment, and strife between the two women.

Hagar now looks down on Sarah in disdain (Gen. 16:4), and Sarah responds with mistreatment and harshness toward Hagar (v. 7). Things get so bad that Hagar flees, walking nearly seventy miles to the wilderness of Shur (v. 7). Hagar was used, mistreated, and wronged. Now she's a pregnant foreigner staggering through the desert with no supplies, teetering on the edge of survival. She no doubt felt alone, hurt, uncared for, and weary. Life tasted bitter and disappointing. Rock bottom was her new home.

Do circumstances ever feel so daunting or discouraging that you wonder how or if you'll make it? Do you ever want to escape, run from the past or present, or get away from people? Do you ever sit alone and feel like no one gets you or no one sees the burdens you carry or the difficulties you've endured?

We can sympathize with Hagar's flight into the wilderness and all the things she likely thought, felt, and experienced. But when we feel like we're stuck deep down in a dark pit, even there, God's grace can reach us. Read what happens next in Genesis 16:7–14.

The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. And he said, “Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?” She said, “I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai.” The angel of the LORD said to her, “Return to your mistress and submit to her.” The angel of the LORD also said to her, “I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude.” And the angel of the LORD said to her,

“Behold, you are pregnant
and shall bear a son.
You shall call his name Ishmael,
because the LORD has listened to your affliction.
He shall be a wild donkey of a man,
his hand against everyone
and everyone's hand against him,
and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen.”

So she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, “You are a God of seeing,” for she said, “Truly here I have seen him who looks after me.” Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered.

While Hagar runs into the wilderness to hide from it all, it's there she discovers she's never been hidden from God. She slumps into the wilderness all alone, but God befriends her. She enters the wilderness with tears of sorrow and bewilderment but will exit with tears of joy in worship.

To see and experience what God intends to do for and in you, consider these four lessons from Hagar's wilderness wanderings.

1. God befriends us in the wilderness.
2. God sees and hears us.
3. God's help is already on the way.
4. God transforms our wilderness desperation into worship in the desert.

God doesn't abandon us in the wilderness, but it's there He proves His faithfulness and care. He reveals Himself in new ways (if we will look for Him). He provides and protects us from the dangers that threaten us (if we will wait on Him). And He grows our faith and molds our character (if we will trust Him).

GOD BEFRIENDS US IN THE WILDERNESS

Though Hagar runs into the wilderness, she cannot escape the God who pursues her. The “angel of the LORD” finds her by a spring of water (Gen. 16:7). Hagar knows that this figure's compassionate presence and comforting promises means God has drawn near to her (v. 13).

Our undesirable condition causes us to cry out to God, and our utter dependence stirs the compassion of God. As Charles Spurgeon wrote about this story, “Grief has an eloquent voice when mercy is the listener.”³ God finds Hagar and speaks to her. He speaks not with words of rebuke or condemnation but with words of kindness, hope, and comfort. She assumes no one cares about her, but God reveals His steadfast love to her. His gaze conveys no trace of disdain and His voice carries no tone of frustration, only gentleness and grace.

Part of what pushes Hagar to bolt is she has no one who looks out for her. She's friendless, forsaken. She feels unseen and unloved. And yet, it's in the wilderness that Hagar realizes not

only does God see her and know her, but God also befriends her. Old Testament scholar Iain Duguid writes, “Hagar was fortunate. In the wilderness, she met a better friend, the angel of the Lord. Like Eve before her, she found that her sin and failure were not the end of the story. The Lord was out there in the wilderness looking for the wanderer.”⁴ The wilderness becomes a place of “fortune” because it’s there Hagar finds a “better friend” in the Lord.

God tells her to return to Sarah and Abraham (v. 9) because it’s through their household she and Ishmael will be blessed (vv. 10–12). Sometimes God’s answer or direction might not be what we wanted. We might be stuck in a place of limbo or wanting out of our situation, and God asks us to stay put and be faithful.⁵ But He does so promising to be with us and fulfill His good plans for us.

*What we need
most in the
wilderness isn’t
escape from our
problems but
the experience of
His presence.*

What we need most in the wilderness isn’t escape from our problems but the experience of His presence. Our dry desert becomes a soul-restoring sanctuary when God meets us there.

While the wilderness is a place no one wants to be in, and while we might *feel* lost, stuck, alone, or forgotten there, the wilderness does not close us off from God. Too often we decide trials are a lock keeping God out when they can actually be a key that opens the door for us to encounter Him. We’re tempted to believe the lie that in our pain He is far, but Hagar’s story affirms He is near. God met Hagar in the wilderness and He will meet you there as well.

GOD SEES AND HEARS US

While hours earlier Hagar sat by a spring, dismayed by life's difficulties, her life has been turned around by the God who hears her affliction and sees her sorrow. What Hagar latches on to about God is that even though she feels hidden and overlooked in daily life, she is seen and known by God. Hagar's son will be Ishmael, which means God hears (Gen. 16:11). Hagar names God "El roi" (v. 13), which translates as either "You are a God of seeing" or "You are a God who sees me." She then adds, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me" (v. 13). And if the theme of God seeing her isn't clear enough, the well is called Beer-lahai-roi, meaning the "well of the Living One who sees me."

Hagar shows up again just a few chapters later (Gen. 21:8–21). About fourteen years after Hagar returned to Abraham's household, Sarah finally births a son. A couple of years into little Isaac's life, Sarah wants Hagar and Ishmael out of the picture. It's a painful loss for Abraham because he loves Ishmael. He loads them up before they depart into the desert (again).

It's not long before they run out of supplies and collapse in exhaustion. With no water left, death starts knocking on Hagar's door. The resources needed aren't there, and the situation is beyond her control. The pain of watching her child suffer is too great to bear, so she walks far enough away that she won't have to watch him die (v. 16). Every parent knows that your child's pain cuts deeper than your own.

Sixteen years passed but Hagar wandered in one big circle. She's back where she started in the badlands. God had told her Ishmael would live and she would have grandkids galore. Had God failed in His promise? Does this distressing situation mean God had forgotten them?

As Hagar weeps over her child, God again *hears* her cries and *speaks* to her (v. 17). He tells her to go to Ishmael because God's plans still stand. He always keeps His Word. Just because we can't foresee how God will be faithful doesn't mean He isn't faithful. God opens her eyes to see a well of water to refresh and sustain them. Her dark night is greeted by the dawn of new mercies.

Both in Genesis 16 and in Genesis 21, Hagar's story features God's hearing and seeing. God heard her cries and prayers . . . twice. God saw her suffering and the trials she endured.

Even when it seems like our plans have failed, God's plans have not. Even when we run from our past or kick against the troubles of today, God assures us that we have a future with Him. And even when we are overwhelmed by dangers and threats, God is strong enough but also gracious enough to carry us through whatever storm we face.

Wherever you are, whatever wilderness you're in, whatever you might be tempted to believe about being alone, unknown, or uncared for, God hears you, sees you, and knows you. Even in desolate places, your prayers do not fall on deaf ears and you have not drifted out of His sight. Your desperation in the wilderness is not hopeless because God is your helper.

Sometimes it takes feeling uncared for by everyone before we discover how much God cares for us. When I say He *cares for us* I mean both that He loves (cares about) us and will take care of us. In 1 Peter 5:7 we're encouraged to cast our burdens, anxieties, or worries on God because *He cares for us*. When we feel overwhelmed, discouraged or in despair, fearful and afraid, or when pain howls, God reassures us that He hears our cries and sees our circumstances. His "seeing" is not just awareness but compassion on us and commitment to us.

The language of God hearing and seeing us permeates the

Bible because we need to be reminded of it (see Ex. 2:24–25; Pss. 10:17; 106:44; Mark 6:34). Like how a parent with a baby monitor can see and hear their child, whether that child knows it or not, God always watches over us and listens to us. Your inability to see Him in the fog of life doesn't affect or alter His ability to see and hear you.

This should give our souls a deep exhale. We can rest in the all-knowing, all-seeing God's unceasing watchfulness and care.

You might have an objection at this point. We can think wrongly about God and assume that when He “sees” us it must be with some level of disappointment, disgust, or frustration. We might imagine a perfectly holy God who scowls or frowns when He sees us in our sin and mess, but Jesus secures God's unending smile upon us. If we are in Christ (by grace through faith), then what God sees isn't our sin but Christ's righteousness. Jesus paid for our sin and His perfect righteousness given (imputed) to us is the basis of our acceptance by God. When your prayers and cries hit God's ears they are met with nothing but compassion and love. Because you belong to Him, you are heard, seen, known, and loved.

GOD'S HELP IS ALREADY ON THE WAY

So often in life, especially on the desert road, it looks like there's no way God can supply what we need. Or it looks like He simply hasn't. We glance in every direction and don't see any help on the horizon. Despair and worry settle over us. We grab the towel and get ready to throw it in. And then, in God's perfect timing and according to His complete wisdom, God provides what we need. Often, the help was on the way in our hour of desperation, we just didn't know it yet.

When Hagar found herself in the wilderness the second time

(Gen. 21), Ishmael stood on the brink of death. But God again showed up and took care of them. He opened Hagar's eyes to see a well of water they had unknowingly been led to (v. 19). What felt like a path to nowhere had purpose. While circumstances appeared as if God had failed or forgotten them, His storehouse of life-giving water was just around the corner. He provided for them, and He did it in a way that only He could.

This story reminds me of how some long-distance hikers on trails like the Appalachian Trail have people stash provisions for them at appointed places on the trail. They know there will be long stretches of trail that wear them down and they'll lack options for food, water, or medicine. They might not always know how much farther they need to walk, but a hidden cache of fresh water and replenishing food already awaits them ahead. An exhausted hiker whose legs feel like jelly or whose feet can't endure another mile can press on a bit more knowing supplies are just ahead.

Likewise, God is looking out for us and has already placed provision in just the right place. We won't always see it or know it far in advance, but it will be there when we need it. Help is already on the way.

Part of how God builds our faith-endurance is stretching our faith-muscles. Press on in weakness with eyes open and alert to how God's help or strengthening presence might appear when you least imagine it. We tend to lose heart or turn back too quickly, and God's answer or sustaining grace might be just around the bend. If God stocked Hagar with a well in the wilderness, then He can certainly give you whatever it is you need today. Pray for eyes to see it and for faith to press on just a bit more until you find it. Don't grow weary. The strength, help, resources, wisdom, or grace you need are already en route.

GOD TRANSFORMS OUR WILDERNESS DESPERATION INTO WORSHIP IN THE DESERT

It's in the wilderness that Hagar discovers a God of love, compassion, and kindness. She learns about the God who is present in pain, provides for their needs, and turns her bitter circumstances into a sweet moment of tasting God's goodness. The wilderness becomes a place of worship because Hagar realizes the pain isn't pointless. She experiences firsthand how no one is outside of or beyond God's love and mercy, nor are any circumstances too difficult for Him, to supply what's needed.

In her weakness and desperation, God reveals His glory and grace to her, and it transforms her barren wilderness into a place of joyful worship.

To experience this, you need to believe it's possible. If you assume the desert can only mean destruction, you'll miss seeing God work in your weakness or you'll miss His presence in your pain. But if you believe God can turn the desert into an oasis (Isa. 41:18), if you believe God can lead you into worship and joy out of your wilderness, then you'll look for how He might bring it about. Faith primes the pump of our heart to receive God's powerful work in the wilderness.

A FAITH FORMED IN THE WILDERNESS

No matter who we are or where we run, God is the Good Shepherd who pursues His sheep, with no person beyond His compassion, no place beyond His reach, and no trials beyond His ability to provide. God can pour out His grace on our sin, restoration and healing for our mistreatment, comfort in our pain, blessings where we've been cursed, and direction when we're lost. He aims

to turn your spiritual desert into an oasis by overflowing your cup with the living waters.

Maybe you are in a season of life where you feel unseen or unheard. Maybe you feel like you work at a job or around little kids and go unnoticed and unappreciated. Maybe you live with pain, trauma, wounds, fears, or temptations that you keep inside, and you feel alone and unknown. Maybe you put up a good front of strength before others but inside you feel overwhelmed or anxious. Whatever it is you're going through and however hidden and invisible you feel, God hears and sees you. He looks on you with love and stays with you through it all. And because He sees you and is with you and fully knows you, He will strengthen and sustain you. He will restore and refresh you. He is working out His plans for you and keeping His promises to you. It's not a question of "if" but of "how" and "when."

In this season, in the trial or trouble you're in right now, look for how God might reveal Himself and draw near to you. He is your friend, your shepherd, and your helper. Receive the spiritual blessings and gifts of grace God gives you in the wilderness. Rest in His promises and abide in His presence. Find comfort in knowing that if the God of all glory and all grace sees and hears you, then you will never be ignored, forgotten, or abandoned. He is with you and near to you.

Ways To Respond

READ the Bible to meet God and hear from God in the wilderness. The Bible is His voice. He speaks with living power and gentle grace through it. Utilize the 40-Day Reading Plan at the back of this book to be in God's Word so you can learn more about who He is and how He's at work. If that sounds daunting, listen to the Bible.

REMEMBER these truths from Hagar's story and cling to them for your own life.

1. God befriends you in the wilderness. Whether in the fiery furnace or through the deep waters, He is with you.
2. God sees and hears you. In your place of desperation or isolation, God looks on you, listens to you, and knows and loves you.
3. God's help is already on the way. The wilderness isn't proof God hasn't kept His promises but it's (strangely enough) part of how He keeps His promises.
4. Believe God can transform your wilderness desperation into worship in the desert. God alone can and does declare, "I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert" (Isa. 43:19).

RECORD a prayer that responds to God in trust and praise.

God, You know my wilderness situation of.....
.....

Thank You for hearing my cries and seeing my struggles.
But You also know the help or resources I need that You
alone can provide. Help me to trust You as I wait, but I ask
You to provide
..... I know what my heart needs
most is to find joy, comfort, and strength in Your presence
and promises, so draw near and reveal Yourself to me.

Discussion Questions

1. Read Genesis 16:1–16 and 21:8–21. What do you think Hagar likely felt, thought, and experienced in her two wilderness experiences?
2. Why should it encourage us that God sees and hears us when we walk through the desert?
3. Have you ever walked through hardship, sorrow, a dry season, discouragement, or some difficulty that deepened your relationship with God or expanded your view of Him? Explain.
4. Of the key truths highlighted in Hagar's story, which do you most need to remember or respond to in this season? Why?
5. As you experience the wilderness, how can you intentionally look for how God is working and deepen your friendship with Him?

Interested in the whole book?
Select your preferred book seller:

MOODY PUBLISHERS



AMAZON



APPLE BOOKS



BARNES & NOBLE



CHRISTIANBOOK.COM



WALMART

